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SIPDIS

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E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [ETRD](#) [ECON](#) [EFIN](#) [HO](#)

SUBJECT: Honduras: Biosafety Update

REF: SECSTATE 259661

1. Summary: The GOH has introduced no new restrictive laws or regulations that pertain to Living Modified Organisms (LMOs) or biotechnology since the First Meeting of the Parties to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety in February 2004. Honduras remains generally open to the import of LMOs and biotech crops. However, the application of sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) requirements is sometimes lacking in transparency, resulting in uncertainty among U.S. suppliers and Honduran importers. Several examples are provided below of instances in which the application of SPS regulations has adversely impacted U.S. companies in 2004. End summary.

2. Since 2002, Honduras has imposed a ban on poultry products from a number of states in the U.S. because of concerns over low-pathogenic avian influenza (LPAI). The ban was revised and renewed in March 2004, in spite of World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) guidelines that the presence of LPAI does not justify trade restrictions and despite information provided to GOH officials by USDA indicating the dates on which depopulation and surveillance testing were completed in the affected states. The U.S. Department of Agriculture estimates that if Honduran restrictions on U.S. raw poultry and poultry parts were lifted, U.S. producers could export an additional \$10 million of poultry products to Honduras annually.

3. In January 2004, U.S. rice exporters complained that they were being forced to fumigate with methyl bromide shipments of U.S. rice that had false smut present before the shipment would be allowed into Honduras. This restriction added costs and delays to the shipping and is not justifiable on food safety grounds. (The presence of false smut is a quality issue, but the GOH imposed restrictions as if it were a health issue.) In September 2004, the GOH authorities stopped requiring fumigation in response to information provided by APHIS on the practice.

4. The Honduran government requires that sanitary permits be obtained from the Ministry of Health for all imported foodstuffs and that all processed food products be labeled in Spanish and registered with the Division of Food Control (DFC) of the Ministry of Health. During 2003, a U.S. supermarket chain complained that these regulations were not being strictly enforced for many of its Honduran competitors. This lack of enforcement on the part of the Honduran government places any U.S. company that does comply with the regulations at a disadvantage.

5. The Embassy has also received complaints from a regional supermarket chain that imported more than \$40 million worth of U.S. goods into the region in 2003 and believes the amount of its imports into Honduras could grow significantly if a more transparent and efficient process of granting sanitary permits existed. Specifically, the company has complained that the length of time required for a sanitary permit to be granted (usually 2 to 3 months) is too long, that the cost of a permit (\$500 - \$600) is excessive, and that the application requires information that is difficult to obtain and has little to do with the safety of the product in question.

Palmer